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ABSTRACT

The only woman in the first graduating class of the world's first school of journalism at the University of Missouri, Mary Paxton Keeley was offered a position as a special reporter for the "Kansas City Post" in 1910. As was typical for female journalists at the time, most of Paxton's assignments during her 15 months with the "Post" were special features including divorce scandals, child custody fights, society stories (the demise of the hat pin, for example), and education features. She was also assigned to interview political radical Emma Goldman and to cover a suffrage speech by Sylvia Pankhurst in Kansas City. Paxton left the "Post" after an attack of appendicitis, and the next few years were spent with family in Michigan and Mississippi. On the advice of her former journalism school dean, she moved to Chicago to study home economics but soon grew restless and took a position as a county extension agent in Virginia. During World War I, she volunteered for overseas duty as a "Doughnut Girl." She married Edmund Keeley when she returned to Virginia, but when Edmund died 7 years later, she returned to Missouri to earn her masters degree. She taught journalism and writing for 24 years at Christian College in Columbia, Missouri, and wrote and published a number of plays and books. Paxton-Keeley died in 1986 at the age of 100. (AEW)

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History Division

THE "SPECIAL" WAY: MARY PAXTON AND HER JOURNALISM DEGREE

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THE "SPECIAL" WAY: MARY PAXTON AND HER JOURNALISM DEGREE

INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 1908, a 22-year-old woman sat on the steps of Academic Hall on the University of Missouri campus in Columbia, waiting for the world's first school of journalism to open its doors.[1] Mary Gentry Paxton was one of eighty-four men and thirteen women to enter the school that fall. Two years later, five men and Mary Paxton comprised the graduating class of 1910.[2]

Six days after she became the first woman graduate of the school, Mary Paxton reported to her first day of work at the Kansas City Post. City Editor A.B. McDonald looked up from his desk and told her in a loud voice to sit down. She remained sitting in his office for the next three hours while people came and went, staring at her as they would an oddity in a carnival side show. McDonald himself hated the thought of a woman in the city room. His rival newspaper, the Star, wouldn't have one: why was he being forced to accept the first skirted newsman in Kansas City history?[3]

Mary Paxton landed her new job because Winifred Black, a nationally famous woman reporter with the Hearst newspapers, was married to McDonald's boss, managing editor Charles A. Bonfils. Black had met Paxton in Columbia during Editor's Week, sponsored by the journalism school. Black, who also wrote under the name Annie Laurie, urged the graduating senior to apply at the Post. "I'll get Charlie to hire you," Black told her.[4]

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* The author would like to thank the librarians at the University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection and State Historical Society of Missouri for their assistance in this research and Dr. Karen List for her encouragement.

Late in the afternoon of her first day at work, Mary Paxton finally received an assignment from McDonald. Somehow six children had managed to climb aboard one horse out on the edge of town, and McDonald wanted it covered.[5] Ironically, the side show's first assignment was a side show.

It may have been ironical, but McDonald's use of Paxton was normal for the time. Women in city rooms early in this century and during the late decades of the last often were used to cover novelties. To have them write the hard news of the day would usurp the men in the business. Therefore, women in the newsroom were treated with hostility. Despite such prejudice, when the first schools of journalism were established, women enrolled. This phenomenon deserves further study. This paper will explore how one woman came to be sitting on the steps one day, literally waiting for the world's first journalism school to open its doors. What motivated her to choose her unconventional path? What obstacles hindered or altered her goals? What did she find and how was she treated in the new journalism school and the all-male city room on the other side?

The Mary Paxton Keeley papers at the University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection were the primary source for data for this paper.[6] Sources include early diaries, poems and other writings, newspaper articles by and about Mary Paxton Keeley, and oral and written interviews with her. Specifically, references were sought that allude to her aspirations as a journalist, as a woman with a career, her relationship to her family and role models in her life. The paper will focus on Keeley's experiences before, during and shortly after her time at

the University of Missouri School of Journalism. It is not intended to be a biography of her entire life or career.

"SLOVENLY VIXENS": WOMEN NEWSPAPERMEN

Although several well-known women journalists such as Nellie Bly and Winifred Black became nationally famous during the late Nineteenth Century, it wasn't until the first decade of this century that women began to work in newsrooms with more regularity. Marion Marzolf points out, however, that the 300 or so women in newsrooms by 1910 were still limited to women's pages, feature writing, stunts, columns and sob sister reporting.[7]

Throughout the first three decades of this century, women faced prejudice in the newsroom from male bosses and fellow workers. Stanley Walker, city editor for the New York Herald-Tribune, indicates how women were perceived by their male bosses and fellow workers in his foreword to Ishbel Ross's 1936 history of women journalists, Ladies of the Press.[8] "From the first, wrote Walker, "the woman who sought to make a place for herself in newspaper work has found editors prejudiced against her. Now, this prejudice is not so great as it was, but it still exists, and there are several reasons for it." The reasons, said Walker, are based on the fact that men are afraid and suspicious of women. Indeed, "a great many of the girls who have managed to get on newspaper payrolls have been slovenly, incompetent vixens, adepts at office politics, show-offs of the worst sort, and inclined to take advantage of their male colleagues."[9]

Women in the field offered mixed advice to novice female

journalists. At a 1914 Journalism Week session at the University of Missouri, Elizabeth Meriwether Gilmer, who wrote the Dorothy Dix advice column for Hearst's New York Evening Journal, spoke on "Woman's Opportunity in Journalism." She cautioned the women in her audience to "work along the line of sex and heredity and keep well within their own fold."[10]

On the other hand, newspaper work was not a bad way to go through life, Clara Chapline Thomas of the Minneapolis Tribune told the women journalism students at the 1913 J-Week at the University. Newspaper work is fulfilling for the modern woman, who "with her new hopes and aspirations and thoughts, finds herself constantly reaching out day by day, striving to make more of herself--to do more for others who are striving."[11]

By the mid-1930s, Ross reports, there were nearly 12,000 women editors, feature writers and reporters in the country in both large and small newspaper offices. But the Herald-Tribune star expressed her concern that women "have not made much impression in the front-page field." City editors rarely take chances and give the big stories to the star reporters, who are male, wrote Ross. She concludes:

> The fact remains that they never were thoroughly welcome in the city room and they are not quite welcome now. They are there on sufferance, although the departments could scarcely get along without them. But if the front-page girls were all to disappear tomorrow no searching party would go out looking for more, since it is the fixed conviction of nearly every newspaper executive that a man in the same spot would be exactly twice as good.(12)

MARY PAXTON AND THE PIONEER EFFECT

Mary Paxton knew she was bucking convention with her choice of a newspaper career, but she always identified strongly with the pioneer element in her family, especially among her female ancestors. Mary felt that she was a part of a thread of female "firsts" in her family. Mary's favorite ancestor was her great-grandmother, Ann Hawkins Gentry, who obviously was an influence in Mary's life, even though she died before Mary was born. Ann and Richard Gentry were pioneers in Kentucky before moving to the Missouri frontier in 1820. After Richard was killed, Ann became the nation's second woman postmaster in 1838 when President Van Buren appointed her to succeed her husband's post in Columbia, Missouri. She served for thirty years. Mary often asked her mother and aunts to tell her about their grandmother and wrote a biographical paper about her great-grandmother when the city of Columbia dedicated a building named after Ann Hawkins Gentry.[13]

Another pioneer role model in Mary Paxton's life was her Aunt Sally--Sarah Jane Gentry--who graduated in 1873 from the University of Missouri, the second woman to do so. "I remember well my mother and my aunts talking about the commotion made when my Aunt Sally entered the University," Mary recalled. "It was a revolutionary thing because my family were very conservative Calvinistic Presbyterians and very conventional." Neighbors told her grandmother that Sally "will be ruined. She will be ruined. It was not meant for girls to go to schools with boys." But Mary's grandmother was adamant and later Mary's mother and two other aunts graduated from the University.[14]

Her father added another female role model to Mary's

collection when he hired Carey Mae Carroll as a stenographer in his law office when Mary was still a young girl. The first woman in Independence to have such a job, Carroll later became the first woman graduate of the Missouri Law School, living with Mary's aunt in Columbia while she studied law.[15]

Both of Mary's parents were book-oriented people. Her mother, whose lack of traditional feminine skills such as sewing were a joke in the family, was an elocutionist and leader of the most intellectual women's study group in Independence. Mary's father, a lawyer, read the classics to Mary and told her stories when she was a little girl. He gave her her first novel to read when she was 7. Mary's favorite room in their house in Independence was the library. Mary, at the age of 8, taught the family's cook, Annie, how to read.[16]

The urge to write also came early for Mary. With her best friend, Bess Wallace (later Mrs. Harry Truman), she formed a secret, all-female organization that met behind Bess's house and staged plays written by Mary.[17] Between 1901 and 1910, Mary wrote 34 short stories which she mailed away to magazines. All were rejected, but she kept elaborate records of which story had been sent to which magazine. The only story her mother ever saw before her death was "The Runaway Girl," written in 1902 when Mary was 15 or 16. Her mother admonished Mary because the story was a badly plagiarized version of "The Goose Girl."[18] She wrote poetry, including two books of bound verse--one handwritten and the other typed. In "A Little Book of Hellish Verse" (1906), the poems often focused on being different and unconventional. "The only thing that keeps me from becoming a maniac is writing and

writing and writing," she wrote in one poem.[19]

Because of her mother's illness and early death, Mary assumed much of the responsibility for caring for her sister and three brothers, as well as for her father and the house. Her sister, Elizabeth, who later was a painter living on an isolated Wyoming hilltop, apparently was a non-comformist from the beginning. When Mary's mother was dying of tuberculosis, she told Mary that Elizabeth must always learn things the hard way. To Mary, her mother said, "You will have to be wise before you ought to be wise. I know you will do the best you can for them [the family], and I know it would be easier for you if your father had not believed in letting you children do exactly as you pleased ...."[20]

Although Mary remembered herself as "a very obedient, bidable child," she, too, had a bent to bend the rules. "In high school I discovered the charm of not doing what I ought to," she remarked. "If I wasn't supposed to be in the hall I would just try to see when I could be in it and it had never occurred to me before that this could be entertaining."[21] One of her teachers at Manual Training High School in Kansas City was her Aunt Sally, who had broken the sex barrier at the University of Missouri. At Manual, Mary was "humor editor" for the student newspaper.[22]

After her mother's death, Mary, at 16, found she was not right for the job of running the household. Like her mother, Mary did not seem to have the skills or desire for the duty. She thought of leaving and told her father she did not know enough about the world. He told her she had learned enough to get married, but, because of her sadness at the loss of her mother,

he told her to choose a college to attend. She picked a Virginia college--Hollins--from an advertisment. Meanwhile her father remarried and had two new children.

By the time Mary returned from Virginia, there was tension between the new and old installments of her father's family. Mary and a cousin left quickly for Chicago "just to be going," Mary recalled.[23] At the University of Chicago she studied criminology as a special student. She asked there if she could study journalism, and she was told that there was no such program in Chicago, but that the University of Missouri was starting a school of journalism that very fall.[24]

PAXTON AND J-SCHOOL

It is not clear why Mary chose to go to journalism school to train for a profession that seemed to barely tolerate women. Margaret Truman, in her biography of her mother and Mary's best friend Bess Wallace Truman, insinuates that Mary's move to Columbia was to be with her new beau, Charles Ross, an Independence boy who had gone to school with Mary and Bess. "There was an extracurricular reason for this haste" to get to Columbia, writes Truman. "During the preceding summer in Independence, Mary had fallen in love with Charlie Ross...."[25] Charlie had graduated from the University of Missouri in 1905 and worked for the Columbia Herald, the St. Louis Post-Dispatch and the St. Louis Republic before Walter Williams, the journalism school's first dean, hired Charlie to teach at the new school.[26]

Could her decision to be so unorthodox as to study journalism have turned on so traditional a cause as the chance to

be near her boyfriend? Mary and Charlie were attracted to each other even before she went away to Virginia to school, and their feelings became serious in the summer of 1907. But she asked about journalism classes in Chicago. She knew at the time, of course, that Ross was working on a newspaper, but she did not seem to know about the new school being formed in Columbia.

Mary insisted that her father allow her to go to Columbia to study journalism, and he gave in one more time, even though her aunts insisted she could not be a lady and be a reporter. The aunts who had given Mary such encouragement through their own examples seemed to draw the line at newspaper work. But Mary was willing to take the pioneer bent of her family that extra step. "I had gone to the University waiting for [the School of Journalism] to start," she wrote later.[27] "As my family were pioneers, I was perfectly anxious to see how I could help it." In another interview, she said, "I knew I was a pioneer and I knew I had to behave with a certain amount of dignity because nobody would follow me if I didn't."[28]

Before she began journalism classes, she had a fairly realistic set of expectations about her slim chances of getting a good job when she graduated. "About the only papers who hired women were the 'yellow' papers, but I came from a pioneering family, so I enrolled anyway," she wrote later.[29]

The school admitted women from the first day. No special classes were offered for women and course descriptions of all journalism courses do not mention any distinctions according to gender. Although use of the "generic he" was predominant in articles about the journalism school and course descriptions,[30]

Dean Walter Williams from the beginning referred to "men and women" when making speeches about his new school. In a speech to the Missouri Press Association following the school's first long term, Williams stated: "It is expected, however, that the man or woman who pursues faithfully the courses of instruction given at the University of Missouri will, at the end of four years, be better equipped for high service than the one who has not had such training."[31] Ross, in the introduction to his newswriting textbook published in 1911, wrote, "It is for newspaper men and women in the making that the book is primarily designed."[32] One of the first staff instructors in the school, Ross did not distinguish either sex in his book as a prerequisite for any type of writing.

But the first meeting of the journalism students and faculty may offer evidence that the women were being tracked toward something other than news. The newspaper account of the meeting reports that "Miss Mary Paxton, representing the six girls in the department--the six coming society editors, as the chairman put it--was asked to tell what she knew about the duties of the society editor." Mary replied that she did not know anything about journalism and that was why she had enrolled.[33]

The University Missourian, the school's daily newspaper that competed with other Columbia newspapers, began publication on the first day of the school's existence in September 1908. Because by-lines were not used then in the Missourian, it is impossible to discern which students wrote the stories. The newspaper contained news and feature articles, as well as opinion.

Although there is not a hint in course descriptions[34] or the

newspaper itself that women students in the early years at Missouri were tracked, apparently they were. Rucker reports in his biography of Williams, that during World War I, "many of the customs and regulations generally imposed on women were relaxed...." With the enrollment composed almost entirely of women, they "covered the courthouse, the city jail, the police department and accepted other asssignments that formerly had been given to men students. They helped edit the news that came in over the wire, and when the paper was printed they sallied forth on their bicycles to deliver it to subscribers throughout the town."[35]

While it is difficult to tell what Mary did for the Missourian, she became involved in a highly visible fight to break the sex barrier on the all-male university yearbook staff. When she asked why women were prohibited from working for the Savitar, she was told that men wanted to smoke at staff meetings. Women, therefore, could not be present. Mary Paxton engineered a bold political maneuver that succeeded in landing a woman on the staff. The women promised to back certain candidates in the campus-wide election if they were given a position on the yearbook. Mary made headlines when she marched into the room on crutches with a sprained ankle with thirty-seven women following her. After the position was approved, they asked Mary to join the staff, but she declined in favor of another woman. "I just thought there ought to be a woman on the Savitar," she replied.[36]

Mary Paxton Keeley often derided the journalism education she received at Missouri. She often claimed to have had only two

good teachers in college and neither of them were in journalism.[37] When she finally sold a freelance article after hundreds of rejections she was surprised because "my copy was horrible for I neither learned to punctuate nor prepare manuscripts properly. I had nobody to supervise the manuscripts."[38]

Shortly before graduation in 1910, she discovered that she lacked several hours of course credit to fulfill her graduation requirements. "I didn't want to hang around," she wrote later, so she went to Dean Williams, who gave her credit for outside work when she dumped a shoebox of rejection slips on his desk. "Since he wanted one girl in his first class in the University of Missouri Journalism School, he made out the necessary papers for me...."[39]

The first Editors Week was held in May 1910, a month before Mary was to graduate. This annual gathering of the nation's newspaper and magazine editors, later called Journalism Week, is a series of speeches, panel discussions and social events designed in part to expose the journalism students to some of the best in their chosen profession. It wasn't Winifred Black's speech, "The News as the Newspaper Woman Sees It," which she delivered at 2 p.m. Wednesday, May 11, in Switzler Hall, that influenced Mary as much as it was the personal advice of "Hearst's sob sister" to apply at the Kansas City Post, which was managed by Black's husband, Bonfils.

"What are you going to do when you graduate?" Black asked Mary.

"I don't know," replied the student who was to graduate in less

than a month.

"Well, I'll have Charlie give you a job."[40]

Mary Paxton's life was changed forever. She was most anxious to work for a newspaper as a reporter and not a society editor. When the Post offered her $8 a week, she accepted, even though her father thought she should be paid more. "I would have paid them to let me work there," she said.[41]

MARY PAXTON, "SPECIAL WRITER"

Mary Paxton had two strikes against her that morning she sat in city editor McDonald's office waiting for him to decide what to do with his new charge: she was a journalism school graduate and a woman. Many, if not most, professional newsmen were skeptical about even male journalism school graduates.[42] But her sex was Mary's major problem. A male acquaintance from the university working for the Post for the summer warned her that "one thing McDonald hates more than a cub reporter is a woman reporter." The Kansas City Star wouldn't have a woman, she recalled in an interview. "You had to get on the yellow paper (the Post)."[43]

Dean Williams was proud of her, though. In a speech before the Northwest Missouri Press Association in February 1911, he reported that the school's seven graduates all had excellent positions. The only woman graduate, said the dean, was a special reporter for the Kansas City Post. "'By their fruits ye shall know them'--By this testimony the School of Journalism of the University of Missouri--the Missouri idea--is willing to

be judged," Williams proudly proclaimed.[44]

Mary commuted from her father's house in Independence to her job in Kansas City each morning on the trolley, reporting to work Monday through Saturday at 8 a.m. and working until at least 5 p.m., except Saturdays, when she stayed until 11 p.m. She complained later of being sent on "very boring assignments like the YMCA and the board of education" and of not getting to cover the police court.[45] But an analysis of the work of the Post's "special writer" indicates she covered four or five different kinds of stories, most of them features: courthouse features of the "sob-sister" type, including divorce scandals and child custody fights; pure society stories such as weddings and the demise of the hat pin; education features from the local schools; and by far the largest category, a women's feature category that included stories on famous suffragists and other outspoken women (an interviewwith Emma Goldman, coverage of Sylvia Pankhurst's speech in Kansas City), conditions at the Missouri women's prison, a series on the local fund drive for construction of a hotel for homeless girls.[46] She considers her major project for the Post an investigation of the Girls' Reform School at Chillicothe "in which I had to get statements from the girls in the red light district of Kansas City, such a neighborhood that the editor sent often a man to accompany me. The series made the first page for a month."[47]

She felt the need to prove herself over and over. "You felt that as a woman you had to do things to show that women could do them," she said.[48] It wasn't until she risked her life in an army observation kite that she learned that her city editor liked

her. When she learned that a photographer had gone up in the kite, which was being tested for the army at Ft. Leavenworth, Mary got the idea she wanted to try it. She told McDonald, but he had promised her father that he'd look after her. "You can't go," he told her. But she went over his head to Bonfils, who gave her permission.[49]

Mary secured her skirts with elastic bands and borrowed a stocking cap from the photographer. When she was 60 feet up in the air, the man operating the kite from the ground began to pull in the seat to keep it within reach (the male reporters had been as high as 200 feet). Under her first by-line, Mary expressed her elation with the "flight" and perturbation with her special treatment: "Even the wind which had been blowing in healthy gusts breathed gentle little contemptuous puffs as if to say: 'You are only a girl and I can not have any fun with you.'"[50]

The next morning when she came downstairs for breakfast, her father was already glaring at the front page article by his daughter, accompanied by a photograph of her dangling from the kite. Her oldest brother told her she had disgraced the family. Her younger brothers were mad because she had not taken them along on the ride. Aunts began to call on the telephone.

"I must have beamed," Mary wrote later, but her father shook his head and moaned, "Oh, Mary. I knew no good would come from your going to work on that wretched paper. Surely I do not have to tell you that no lady ever permits her name to appear in the public press if she can help it, much less her face."

Her brother taunted, "Fools names like fools' faces, are always seen in public places. And look at that picture." He

glared at her. "Just look at that."

But Mary was only looking at her by-line.[51]

Her father was not the only person embarrassed by her job. Since she left college to work for the Kansas City newspaper, she and Charlie Ross had exchanged two letters a day and discussed marriage. But Charlie discovered he was in a dilemma. On the one hand he was proud that his pupil had become the first woman reporter in Kansas City. But he was uncomfortable about a fiancee working with the kind of people that he visualized in the Post's newsroom. Neither was he amused about the stories Mary was writing that caused her to enter red-light districts and fly in kites. His feelings about her became confused.[52]

Mary's father, who seemed unimpressed with any of Mary's beaus, once said Charlie was a nice young man but never would amount to much,[53] a statement Mary could laugh at ironically later, after Charlie won the Pulitzer Prize and became President Truman's press secretary. But Charlie's mother seemed to be the strongly against the match. The woman did not like Mary for two reasons, Mary thought: one, Mary was a poor housekeeper, and two, Mrs. Ross, a strict Cambellite, was suspicious of Mary's membership in the Episcopal church.[54] Mary had joined the church while in Virginia as a reaction to the Baptist education she had been receiving at Hollins.[55] Mary's articles in the Post must have reinforced whatever negative feelings Mrs. Ross had toward her son's intended. Charlie broke the engagement after his family told him he was to take over financial responsibility for his mother and six sisters because his father was going blind.

Mary agreed to the break-up but later wrote vehemently that his family had lied to Charlie, making the situation worse than it really was.

"We were faced with a stone wall and I didn't see how we could climb over," Mary wrote.[56]

Her career at the Post came to an abrupt end 15 months after it began. She suffered an attack of appendicitis while on the trolley on the way to work. After Mary's apendectomy, Charlie and her father convinced her she should not return to the rough and tumble of the city room. The next few years were a lowpoint in Mary life. Ross married someone else and Mary "was sick in a lot of ways."[57] Her father sent her to Michigan and then to Mississippi to stay with cousins. Finally she pulled herself together and made a visit to Dean Williams in Columbia.

Her old dean was ready with new advice for his progeny: "Nobody that knows anything about home economics can write, and, nobody who can write knows anything about home economics. That's a good field."[58]

Mary's life made a sharp turn when she left for Chicago to study home economics. She grew restless before completing her studies and worked as a county extension agent--a combination journalist-home economist--in Virginia for a short time before volunteering for overseas duty during World War I. As a YMCA "Doughnut Girl," she travelled among American troops to help lift their morale. The day she returned to America, she married Edmund Keeley, whom she had met in Virginia. They had one son, Paxton Keeley. For most of her seven-year marrige, Mary

attempted to support her ailing husband and her son through a variety of small-town extension agent and small country newspaper jobs. Her father persuaded her that her job was too hard on her because of the travel involved and encouraged her to take up teaching.[59] So she returned to the Missouri School of Journalism in 1927, a widow with a three-year-old son, to earn her masters degree in journalism. She taught journalism and writing for 24 years at Christian College in Columbia. She wrote and published several plays and books. She died in 1986 at the age of 100.

CONCLUSION

A combination of factors probably contributed to Mary Paxton's vigorous pursuit of a journalism education and career, both unorthodox and nontraditional endeavors for a woman in 1908. Some of those same ingredients may have caused her abrupt shift to "work along the line of sex" and keep within her own fold, as Dorothy Dix advised women journalism students.[60] The pattern of Mary's life is not unlike that of many women who had intellectually rich childhoods and who were encouraged to pursue their individual talents and dreams--to a point. Her parents encouraged her to read, write and express herself. She grew up hearing tales of her pioneer ancestors and seemed to feel destined to continue their spirit through some pioneer effort of her own. She did not shirk from challenges such as being the first woman in journalism school or the first woman in a newsroom, because she had precedents in her own family to follow. Her great-grandmother had ridden a horse from Kentucky with a baby in her lap and worked for thirty years as the second woman

postmaster in the nation. Her aunt was one of the first women to attend the University of Missouri. Mary felt so strongly a part of this pioneer element that she actually sought her own frontier to forage.

Along with--or possibly because of--her pioneer spirit, Mary Paxton was a seeker of action. When she was a little girl she used to pray, "Oh, Lord, don't let me have a dull life."[61] She had a rebellious streak in her. As benign as it may sound eighty years later, she remembered the thrill of breaking school rules, of being somewhere she wasn't supposed to be. She found the same thrill later when she broke the sex barrier on the college yearbook staff, became the first woman to graduate from the School of Journalism and to work in the city room of a Kansas City newspaper. She felt the need to prove herself over and over because of her sex. So she flew in a kite. She went to France during a world war.

Journalism was a natural extension for someone who had the itch to write as strongly as did Mary. There are hints that her mother's early death caused her father to be more permissive about Mary's desires to leave home to study in Virginia, Chicago and to enter journalism school in Columbia. Many puzzles remain, however. Did her friendship with Ross have anything to do with her decision to enter journalism school? Why, just before that, did she study criminology in Chicago? Was there a correlation between her interest in the subject and her desire to be a newspaper reporter, as opposed to a literary writer or society editor?

What obstacles hindered or altered her goals? Mary had managed to vault over some barriers to her gender through whatever desire and gumption she managed to develop in her first twenty to twenty-five years of life. But she maintained the status of "special" throughout these years. The women students at the University of Missouri School of Journalism were seen as "special writers" or future society editors and were not allowed to cover hard news routinely until World War I, when their editors were forced to send them out on the same assignments male students had received for the previous ten years. Dean Williams, who has been praised for his efforts to place his graduates in good positions, had little to do with helping Mary land her first job. Three weeks before she was to graduate, she had no idea what she was going to do until a woman journalist--Winifred Black--practically ordered her to apply to the newspaper where Black had influence. Paxton continued in her status as a special person at the Post. Women reporters were still viewed as stunts and sob sisters, and Mary Paxton played the role. But her stories were not all stunts and sobs. She also wrote news features and series about serious problems.

The special status in which she found herself throughout her education and early career on the one hand allowed her to participate in a different world, but on the other hand, could not sustain her through the dilemma she faced after a year's work on the Kansas City Post. Her father, who had encouraged her to read and write and who had sent her away for her education, was continually upset about her work on the "yellow" newspaper. But Mary claimed that only such newspapers

would hire women in those days. Her college instructor/fiance had the same misgivings as did her father about her career. When Mary had to stop work for an operation, they convinced her to stay away from the newspaper for awhile. By the time she recovered, her betrothed had married someone else. Her father sent her elsewhere once again to recover from more illnesses. Instead of returning to the hard life of a city reporter, she took the advice of her college dean and studied home economics so she could become a special writer in that field.

Thus the same people who had given her encouragement to pursue her goals--her father, her friend and her dean--now withdrew that encouragement and convinced her to alter her route through more charted waters. Mary Paxton, at last, was sailing with, rather than against, the wind.

One aspect of early journalism education for women that is beyond the scope of this paper but that needs further study is the effect formal schools of journalism had on the slow but eventual acceptance of women in newspaper newsrooms. It would seem in the case of Mary Paxton that her journalism degree may have gotten her into the newsroom, but not as a "normal" reporter. Women on newspapers were still oddities hired to write about special subjects, and, therefore, their numbers were kept especially low. Did the appearance of the Mary Paxtons--women who carried college degrees in journalism--on staffs have an effect on eventual acceptance of women in higher numbers?

Mary Paxton Keeley is not in any way the most famous or honored graduate--male or female--of the University of Missouri

School of Journalism. She is known because she was the first woman graduate of the first school of journalism, and her longevity helped sustain the stature. But there is evidence that her decision to enroll in journalism school affected future enrollment. She received a letter in 1974 from a woman living in Illinois who had attended the Missouri School of Journalism in the 1920s and had been inspired by Mary Paxton's experiences. The woman wrote: "To an aspiring writer fresh from a farm near Fulton [Missouri], you, as the first woman graduate of the School of Journalism, spelled big city success....[Y]ou have led the way for women journalism students."[62]

FOOTNOTES

1. Mary Paxton Keeley, taped interview, October 1967, Joint Collection: University of Missouri Western Historical Manuscript Collection-Columbia and State Historical Society of Missouri Manuscripts [hereinafter referred to as Joint Collection]. Missouri is recognized as the first school of journalism, although several universities, including Missouri, had offered journalism courses or departments prior to 1908. For the history of early journalism education, see James Melvin Lee, Instruction in Journalism in Institutions in Journalism of Higher Education, (Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1918); Albert Alton Sutton, Education for Journalism in the United States from Its Beginning to 1940 (Evanston: Northwestern University, 1945); and, for the Missouri story, Sara Lockwood Williams, Twenty Years of Education for Journalism: A History of the School of Journalism of the University of Missouri, Columbia, Missouri, U.S.A. (W.E. Stephens: Columbia, Missouri, 1929).
In addition, Mrs. Rayne's School of Journalism, a non-university affiliated school for women, was founded in 1886 in Detroit. See James S. Bradshaw, "Mrs. Rayne's School of Journalism," Journalism Quarterly, 60:513-517, 579 (Autumn 1983). For a recent overview of problems of women in the early years of journalism education, see Maurine Beasley, "Women in Journalism Education: The Formative Period, 1908-1930," Journalism History, 13:10-18 (Spring 1986).

2. Williams, Twenty Years of Education for Journalism, pp. 452-453. The class of 1910 technically was the second graduating class of the school. One man--Charles Arnold--graduated in 1909 just one year after the school's opening. He was the only member of his "class" (p. 148).

3. Mary Paxton Keeley, Interview, October 1967.

4. Ibid.

5. Ibid.

6. See full citation of Keeley papers in note 1.

7. Marion Marzolf, Up from the Footnote: A History of Women Journalists (New York: Hastings House, 1977), pp. 32-33.

8. Ishbel Ross, Ladies of the Press (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1936), p. xi.

9. Ibid.

10. "The Newspaper a Good Gossip," The University of Missouri Bulletin (University of Missouri, 1914), p. 17.

11. "Women in City News Work," The University of Missouri Bulletin (University of Missouri, 1914), p. 16.

12. Ross, Ladies of the Press, p. 13.

13. Keeley, interview, 1967. The profile of her great-grandmother was entitled "A Profile: Ann Hawkins Gentry" and was written in 1965.

14. Keeley, interview, 1967.

15. "First Woman Graduate of M.U. Law School to [Fiftieth] Annual Reunion," The Independence Examiner, Independence, Missouri, May 1, 1946, p. 2. Mary Paxton Keeley saved the clipping in her files.

16. Mary Paxton Keeley, interview, Oct. 30, 1967.

17. Margaret Truman, Bess W. Truman (New York: Macmillan, 1986), pp. 12-13.

18. A record book found in Folder 310 of the Keeley Papers (see note 1) listed details of story submissions to publications. Also in the folder is the handwritten story "The Runaway Girl," on which was scrawled in Mary Paxton's handwriting: "Mother criticized. The only story she ever saw. Was modelled unconsciously on Kate Douglas Wiggins The Goose Girl." She also details her mother's criticism of the story in "Mary Neil Gentry Paxton," a memoir written by Mary Paxton Keeley in 1961 for her mother's old study club in Independence on the occasion of its being named after her mother.

19. Mary Paxton, "The Wall," a poem in "A Little Book of Hellish Verse," unpublished manuscript, 1906.

20. Mary Paxton Keeley, "Mary Gentry and John Gallatin Paxton: A Memoir" (manuscript, 1966), pp. 77-78.

21. Keeley, interview, 1967.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid.

25. Truman, Bess W. Truman, p. 23.

26. Williams, Twenty Years of Education for Journalism, p. 24.

27. Statement of Mary Paxton Keeley, Oct. 24, 1965.

28. Keeley, interview, 1974.

29. "First Woman Graduate," in School of Journalism: 50th Anniversary, (University of Missouri, 1958), p. 23.

30. See, for example, Williams, Twenty Years of Education for Journalism, p. 53-57. The first printed announcement of the school in 1908, "Training for Journalism," states that the school's purpose is "to furnish well-equipped men for leadership in journalism...(Williams, p. 53). Also see Catalogue (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri, 1908-09), pp. 334-335.

31. Walter Williams, address before Missouri Press Association, 1909.

32. Charles G. Ross, The Writing of News (New York: Henry Holt, 1911), p. ii.

33. University Missourian, October 1, 1908, p. 1.

34. Catalogue, University of Missouri, 1908-09, pp. 334-335.

35. Frank W. Rucker, Walter Williams, (Columbia: Missourian Publishing Association, 1964), p. 175.

36. Keeley, interview, 1974. For a newspaper account of the Savitar maneuver, see University Missourian, Oct. 29, 1908, p. 1. The headlines tell much of the story: "'Co-eds' Machine Carries Election/ Girls by Political Trade Get Representative on Savitar Board/ Miss Mary Paxton is 'Boss'."

37. Keeley, interview, 1974.

38. Mary Paxton, "Good for Something," Writer's Monthly, 74 (October, 1949), p. 205-6.

39. Ibid., p. 205.

40. Keeley, interview, 1967.

41. Keeley, interview, 1974.

42. The debate over the value of on-the-job training vs. journalism classroom education has continued for 100 years. Much of the early debate is preserved in speeches, addresses and editorials written at the outset of journalism schools. See, for example, Williams, Twenty years of Education for Journalism, pp. 3-35.

43. Keeley, Interview, 1967.

44. Walter Williams, address before Northwest Missouri Press Association, St. Joseph, Missouri, February 1911.

45. Keeley, interview, 1974.

46. Five folders (Numbers 267-271) in the Keeley papers (Joint Collection) contain copies of 132 stories written by Paxton for the Kansas City Post. An analysis by subject produced the following breakdown: courthouse ("sob sister"), 19 (14.4%); society, 19 (14.4%); women's features, 55 (41.7%); education, 24 (18.2%); other, 15 (11.4%).

47. Mary Paxton Keeley to Ronald Farrar, October 25, 1965.

48. Keeley, interview, 1967.

49. Mary Paxton, "High as a Kite" (undated manuscript).

50. Mary Paxton, "Girl Makes Kite Flight; Finds Out Reason for Hobble," Kansas City Post (undated newspaper clipping), 1910, p. 1.

51. Paxton, "High as a Kite" (undated manuscript).

52. Truman, Bess W. Truman, pp. 26-27.

53. Keeley, statement, 1965.

54. Ibid.

55. Keeley, interview, 1974.

56. Keeley, statement, 1965.

57. Keeley, interview, 1967.

58. Ibid.

59. Keeley, interview, 1974.

60. University of Missouri Buletin, 1914, p. 17.

61. Keeley, interview, 1967.

62. Frances Dunlop Heron to Mary Paxton Keeley, April 19, 1974.